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NO. 43

LABORATORY BULLETIN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES, HELENA, MONTANA

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No. 43

June 8, 1972

David B. Lackman, Laboratory Administrator, Editor

LABORATORY DIRECTORS - MONTANA

This issue is dedicated to Miss Edith Kuhns who directed the efforts of the Hygienic Laboratory of the Board of Health from September 11, 1935, to September 1, 1967. Edith Kuhns was employed as a bacteriologist by the Board in June 1925 and served as assistant to two directors, Dr. John X. Newman and Mr. Fred Stimpert, before assuming responsibility for the laboratory ten years later. During her 42 years of dedicated service, and due to her perseverance and initiative, a bacteriological service of the highest quality was developed. It was also Miss Kuhns' suggestion that we improve our communications by starting a laboratory bulletin. She also was responsible for much of the planning and initiative which resulted in our very fine physical facilities in the Cogswell Laboratory Building.

Following is a record of laboratory directors as compiled from the minutes and reports of the Board of Health.

Mr. Emil Starz May 22, 1901 - April 16, 1917

"Montana's 7th Legislative Assembly created the State Board of Health with the passage of House Bill No. 104; Governor Joseph K. Toole signed the bill March 15, 1901." At the regular meeting of the Board held in the Governor's office May 22, 1901, "Mr. Emil Starz was appointed State Bacteriologist and the secretary was instructed to get the necessary equipment to carry on the work of that branch of the Board." Present at the meeting were Governor Toole, Attorney General Donovan, Dr. Treacy, Dr. Belcher, and A. F. Longeway, M.D., Secretary of the State Board of Health. Mr. Starz was the first professional public health worker, other than the Board's executive secretary, to be employed by the state.

The first work was culturing for the diphtheria bacillus followed shortly by tuberculosis and then typhoid fever. In the minutes of the Board meeting for May 1, 1902, there is the following statement by Mr. Starz, "In my opinion there can be no doubt as to the wisdom of the Board in providing a free bacteriological test station and its patronage is destined to increase." In a report dated November 21, 1914, a notation is made that the bacteriological laboratory under Mr. Emil Starz is becoming increasingly popular and that the laboratory should be enlarged and the scope of the work increased. Mr. Starz did his work in the old livestock building south of the capitol heating plant. He was trained as a pharmacist and founded the Starz Pharmacy. In the Board minutes for April 16, 1917, there is recorded a letter of resignation from Mr. Emil Starz as state bacteriologist. However, Mr. Starz was still doing work for the Livestock Sanitary Board in 1922. In the minutes of February 10, 1904, there is a note that Dr. C. H. Horst agreed to serve as state bacteriologist - no further mention is made of this so I assume that this was something which never actually took place.

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Dr. Arthur Howard McCray October 1917 - June 14, 1919

Dr. McCray was the first full-time laboratory director and his employment marks the beginning of the hygienic laboratory in Montana. In the course of experimental work on Rocky Mountain spotted fever, he contracted the disease and died on June 19, 1919. In March 1901, a month after creation of the Board of Health, investigation of Rocky Mountain spotted fever was initiated by the Board. In reality the spotted fever problem had provided an impetus for establishing a Board of Health. In 1902, 18 cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever were reported with 15 of them being fatal. In 1913 the Board of Entomology was formed to further stimulate and coordinate spotted fever research. Other major infectious disease problems early in the Board's history were diphtheria, smallpox, typhoid, and tuberculosis. As late as 1916, tuberculosis claimed 521 lives in Montana. During the first ten years of the Board's existence there was a tendency for spotted fever to overshadow other concerns.

Dr. Ernest D. Hitchcock July 19, 1919 - August 1922

Dr. Hitchcock served in the combined position of epidemiologist and laboratory director. Apparently this arrangement was common then. From the biennial report for 1919-1920: "On July 19, 1919, Dr. E. D. Hitchcock, who during the war had charge of the laboratories of the 13th Naval District, located at Bremerton, Washington, was appointed director. The aim of the State Board of Health has been to secure the very best men available as directors of its divisions, paying salaries commensurate with services rendered. This is nothing more than a sound business policy. --- the work of the laboratory has had a phenomenal growth and thus emphasizes, very markedly, the fact that there is an increasing demand for such work in the State of Montana. The work is done free of charge to the people of the state." It was during Dr. Hitchcock's period that the Board of Health Building was completed for occupancy on July 1, 1920. Although Dr. Hitchcock moved to Great Falls to join a clinic, he was still listed as a consultant to the Hygienic Laboratory in November 1944.

Dr. Francis Asbury Coward August 1922 - December 3, 1922

Dr. Coward was the first director of the South Carolina State Department of Health laboratory and left there in August 1922 to become laboratory director and epidemiologist in Montana. He died at his home in Helena on December 3, 1922. There is a note in the minutes that he was introduced to the Board of Health members at their meeting of October 5, 1922.

In the biennial report dated December 1, 1922, there is the following notation: "In addition to the ordinary routine work of the laboratory, the director, Dr. F. A. Coward, has made some investigations along the line of food poisonings. These investigations have not been completed but certain experiments that have been carried on in the laboratory indicate that possibly botulism may be communicated by wound infection."

(In March 1972 the Department received a request from the South Carolina Department of Health for a photograph of Dr. Coward to complete their "gallery" of laboratory directors. We are unable to fill this request but if anyone has such a photograph or negative, I would be glad to forward it to South Carolina.)

Dr. John X. Newman January 1923 - April 8, 1927

In the archives of the laboratory there is a volume of Dr. Newman's notes during the time he was a student at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. This was the period from 1914-1918. The research is mostly concerned with a study of the etiology of Hodgkin's disease for there was evidence at that time incriminating bacteria in the syndrome. Dr. Newman had as mentors such long-time pioneers in bacteriology as Dr. Paul F. Clark and Dr. W. D. Stovall, both of whom I knew because they were still active during the early thirties. Dr. Newman's son, John A. Newman, M.D., is a pathologist now practicing in Butte. It was during Dr. Newman's period that Miss Edith Kuhns was employed as Assistant in the Hygienic Laboratory (June 1925). In the biennial report for 1925-1926 there is the following note regarding the Division of Social Hygiene of the State of Montana: "During the biennium 1924 and 1925, no appropriation was made to carry on the work. The responsibility of the administration of this division was placed without further compensation into the hands of the Director of the Hygienic Laboratory. During this period the division has aided in the campaign against venereal disease by the following methods.

Supplied 1062 doses arsphenamine free to indigents.

Made 15,858 Wassermann tests for syphilis.

Made 966 examinations for gonorrhea.

Made 40 examinations relating to gonorrheal blindness.

Distributed 27,000 Social Hygiene pamphlets requested.

Answered 300 letters relating to treatment.

Gave 104 lectures and showed films to an attendance of about 20,000"

Mr. Fred Stimpert May 1927 - September 11, 1935

In the biennial report for 1927-1928 there is the following paragraph:

"Fred Stimpert is in charge of the Hygienic Laboratory. Mr. Stimpert is a graduate of the University of Montana, majoring in Bacteriology. He spent a year in a commercial laboratory, then taught bacteriology four years in the University of Montana, after which he spent a year at the Pasteur Institute in France. He has as his assistant, Edith Kuhns, a graduate of Montana State College, who, after spending two years as a technician in the State Board of Health Laboratory, was given a fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation and spent a year in Johns Hopkins School of Public Health."

During the forties and fifties I knew Dr. Stimpert as head of bacteriology at Parke Davis. It was during Mr. Stimpert's tenure as laboratory director that the legislature appropriated \$60,000 to construct a laboratory in the Bitter Root Valley to study spotted fever. This was occupied in 1929 for work of the Board of Entomology and the U.S. Public Health Service. In the biennial report for 1931-32 the first outstanding event listed was "The establishment at Hamilton, Montana, of a branch of the National Institute of Health." At this time the laboratory was purchased from the state by the federal government. From the biennial report for 1935-36: "In August, 1935, Fred Stimpert, Director of the Hygienic Laboratory, was granted a year's leave of absence. He had received a fellowship from the University of Southern California to do special work on Infantile Paralysis." This leave of absence was extended for another year but he didn't return to the laboratory and the Board appointed Miss Kuhns director.

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Miss Edith Kuhns September 11, 1935 - August 31, 1967

Miss Kuhns took over as acting director of the Hygienic Laboratory when Mr. Stimpert left on a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to work in California on poliomyelitis. She had already worked over ten years in the laboratory serving as assistant to Dr. Newman and Mr. Stimpert. In Board action on May 17, 1937, Miss Kuhns was appointed director of the Hygienic Laboratory. During her administration several important developments occurred. The Cogswell Laboratory Building was planned, constructed and equipped. Our quarters and equipment are still the envy of some other public health laboratories. Water bacteriology was transferred to the division and public health microbiology, especially determinative microbiology, was developed to a high level of quality. A virology laboratory was started in 1957.

Dr. David B. Lackman September 1, 1967 - March 31, 1977

Dr. Lackman was appointed director of the Microbiology Laboratory Division of the Department of Health upon the retirement of Miss Kuhns. On November 29, 1971, Governor Forrest H. Anderson issued the executive order reorganizing the Department of Health under the reorganization act of 1971 (Section 82 A - 101-2103, RCM 1947). This created the Department of Health and Environmental Sciences with six divisions. All laboratory activities of the department were consolidated in a Laboratory Division with Chemistry Laboratory and Microbiology Laboratory Bureaus. Dr. Lackman was appointed Administrator of the Division and Chief of the Microbiology Laboratory Bureau. On December 1, 1941, Dr. Lackman reported for duty as serologist - immunologist at the Rocky Mountain Laboratory in Hamilton coming from the Department of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, University of Pennsylvania. Upon retirement from the U.S. Public Health Service on March 31, ~~1972~~ ¹⁹⁶⁷, he was employed as a virologist by the State Department of Health.

Other laboratory activities in the Department:

While bacteriology and the Hygienic Laboratory was being developed in Helena, laboratory work under the Food and Drug and the Water and Sewage Laws was being done at Montana State College in Bozeman. Both laws were passed during the 1911 legislative session and laboratory work became the responsibility of faculty members at the College. In accordance with the laws, a State Laboratory for analyzing foods, drugs, and water was opened on January 2, 1912. From the report for 1911-1912: "Under the Pure Food law the Professor of Chemistry at the State Agricultural College is made the Chemist to the State Board of Health, and is required to make all analyses of foods, drugs, etc. For this purpose he is allowed one assistant at \$1,500 per year." "The law provides that this laboratory shall be located at the Bozeman State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Bozeman, and consequently President J. M. Hamilton of the college authorized the following organization of the laboratory staff:

W. M. Cobleigh, Chemist
C. E. Mollet, Director of Drug Analyses
D. L. Weatherhead, Analyst
D. B. Swingle, Bacteriologist
Carl Gottschalk, Assistant in Chemistry
Ella Olson, Clerk and Stenographer

With the exception of Mr. Weatherhead, Mr. Gottschalk and Miss Olson, the laboratory staff are members of the college faculty and their time is occupied primarily with teaching."

You will recognize at least two names associated for many years with the development of the college and long service as consultants to the Board of Health; W. M. Cobleigh and D. B. Swingle. On July 1, 1923, the food and water laboratory equipment belonging to the State Board of Health was moved to Helena and the laboratories were installed in the State Board of Health Building. Previous to this time samples had been examined at Bozeman under the direction of Professor W. M. Cobleigh. At the time of the move, H. B. Foote was Director of the Division of Water and Sewage with W. M. Cobleigh as Consultant and G. D. Wiles was Director of the Food and Drug Division with W. M. Cobleigh as Consultant. Mr. Foote taught bacteriology at Bozeman and then went out of the state to study at Harvard under a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship. (During the twenties the Rockefeller Foundation supported work in the State Health Department on several occasions.) At various times laboratory work in Industrial Hygiene has been carried on in the Department and in the biennial report for 1949-1950 there is a part devoted to a Division of Industrial Hygiene (organized in 1939) and a picture with the caption "Industrial Hygiene Laboratory". This was located in the old livestock building south of the capitol heating plant. Ludwig Champa, present Chief of the Chemistry Laboratory Bureau, is pictured at the bench.

These notes concerning laboratory directors in Montana also put our laboratory in the record for 1972, the centennial year of the American Public Health Association. The Laboratory Section of the Association was the second to be organized and it has a seventy-fifth anniversary coming up. The first State Board of Health diagnostic bacteriology laboratory was started in New Orleans, Louisiana April 15, 1894. The first State Board of Health chemical laboratory was established in Minnesota in 1873. Credit for the first public health bacteriology laboratory goes to the New York City Board of Health when Dr. Herman Biggs, Chief of the Division of Pathology, in 1893, offered to assist in the diagnosis of diphtheria. The first director of this laboratory was Dr. William Hallock Park. It should be mentioned that a bacteriology laboratory was established in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1888, but its work was related to study of water supplies before it developed the general diagnostic work of a public health laboratory. Although the Montana Board of Health got started with bacteriology in 1901 by appointing a state bacteriologist, it wasn't until 1917 that a full-time Hygienic Laboratory began operation. (Most of the information in this paragraph is taken from "The First State Board of Health Laboratories in the United States" by Ben Freedman, M.D., M.P.H., Public Health Reports: 69 pp 867-875, September 1954.)

Much of the history of public health in Montana revolves around Dr. W. F. Cogswell, a Livingston physician, who was named executive secretary of the State Board of Health in December 1912 and who served the state as an outstanding health officer until his retirement in 1946, thirty-four years later. He was vigorous and outspoken in his support of the role of the laboratory in public health and our building was designated, in 1955, as the W. F. Cogswell building in his honor.

